

Message Text

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INFO AMEMBASSY COPENHAGEN
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AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
AMEMBASSY OSLO
AMEMBASSY PARIS
AMEMBASSY REYKJAVIK
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 STOCKHOLM 2384

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PEPR, UR, SW
SUBJ: SWEDISH-SOVIET RELATIONS

1. THE JUNE VISIT OF THE SWEDISH ROYAL FAMILY TO THE SOVIET UNION GAVE BREZHNEV AND THE OTHER SOVIET LEADERS A CHANCE TO SHOW THEIR APPRECIATION OF ROYAL BLOOD (WITH THE EXCEPTION OF RUNNIAN, OF COURSE) AND TO INDULGE IN THE THICK HOSPITALITY THEY DOTE ON. POLITICAL SUBSTANCE WAS SUCCESSFULLY EXCLUDED FROM THE PERFORMANCE, WITH THE EXCEPTION OF ONE MENTION BY THE FOREIGN MINISTER TO GROMYKO OF DIVIDED FAMILIES. OUR SWEDISH FRIENDS DO NOT CONFUSE CEREMONY WITH POLITICS AND TELL US THAT RELATIONS WITH THE USSR ARE NOT VERY GOOD NOW. A NUMBER OF IRRITANTS OBTRUDE, MOST CONNECTED WITH HUMAN RIGHTS IN SOME WAY. HOWEVER, THE ROYAL VISIT SHOWED AGAIN THE INTEREST OF BOTH SIDES IN KEEPING IRRITANTS UNDER WRAPS AND SHOWING A DETENTISH SMILE TO THE PUBLIC. SOME
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GENERAL COMMENTS ON CURRENT SWEDISH-SOVIET RELATIONS ARE APPENDED. END SUMMARY.

2. WE UNDERSTAND FROM MFA SECRETARY-GENERAL LEIF LEIFLAND AND OTHERS WHO WENT ON THE VISIT OR FOLLOWED IT THAT THE CEREMONIAL PART WENT THOROUGHLY WELL. HOSPITALITY WAS REGAL. SWEDES THOUGHT THAT BREZHNEV, WHO PRESUMABLE HAD HIS OWN

INTEREST IN SHOWING OFF HIS CHIEF-OF-STATE-CON, GAVE THEM MORE TIME AND ATTENTION THAN THEY EXPECTED. WHILE THE TALKS WITH THE ROYAL COUPLE WERE UNDEMANDING FOR BREZHNEV, AND HE HANDLED THEM WELL, THE SWEDES NOTED HOW STIFFLY BREZHNEV MOVED AND HOW LIMITED HIS PHYSICAL RESOURCES SEEMED, AND DID NOT COME AWAY OPTIMISTIC ABOUT HIS GENERAL CONDITION.

3. THE HEAVY LEANING WAS DONE BY THE RUSSIANS ON LEIFLAND DURING HIS VISIT A FEW WEEKS PREVIOUS; THIS TIME GROMYKO STUCK TO STANDARD EXPOSITION OF SOVIET VIEWS DURING HIS TALK WITH FOREIGN MINISTER SODER. DESPITE LEIFLAND'S HAVING BEEN IN EFFECT WARNED AGAINST RAISING DIVIDED FAMILIES DURING THE ROYAL VISIT. MRS. SODER STUCK TO HER COMMITMENT TO DO SO. BUT SHE DID IT IN THE LEASE CONTROVERSIAL WAY, NAMING NO NAMES AND SIMPLY NOTING THAT THE SOVIET SIDE KNEW VERY WELL THE SWEDISH POSITION ON THIS ISSUE. GROMYKO INTERRUPTED BY SAYING HE WOULD GIVE MRS. SODER THE SAME ANSWER THEY GAVE PRESIDENT CARTER WHEN HE RAISED THIS MATTER, NAMELY THAT SUCH THINGS HAD TO BE SOLVED IN ACCORDANCE WITH SOVIET LAW. GROMYKO THEN PROMPTLY SWITCHED TO ANOTHER SUBJECT, CUTTING OFF DISCUSSION OF DIVIDED FAMILIES. ASIDE FROM THIS BRIEF CONTRE-TEMPS, NOTHING UNUSUAL WAS SAID DURING THE TALKS. THE SWEDES FELT THAT THE SOVIET LEADERS, PARTICULARLY GROMYKO, SHOWED CONSIDERABLE OPTIMISM ABOUT A SALT AGREEMENT.

4. THE CEREMONY OF THE ROYAL VISIT MET THE INTEREST OF BOTH
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SIDES IN A PUBLIC SHOW OF GOOD RELATIONS. THE SOVIETS PRESUMABLY ARE HAPPY TO HAVE FRIENDSHIP DEMONSTRATED WITH A PROMINENT NEUTRAL AT A TIME WHEN RELATIONS WITH SOME OTHER WESTERN COUNTRIES INCLUDING THE US ARE LESS THAN HAYCYON. THE SWEDES HAVE THEIR EYE FIXED ON PRESERVING THE STATUS QUO IN THE NORDIC AREA AND DO NOT WANT TO SEE ANY INCREASE IN EAST-WEST TENSION SPREAD NORTHWARD. BUT THE SWEDES LOOK BEYOND CEREMONY OR HOSPITALITY AND NOTE NUMEROUS POINTS OF FRICTION WITH THE USSR. FOR ONE THING, THE SWEDISH PUBLIC IS FIXED ON THE HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATION IN THE USSR, WITH SPECIAL ATTENTION TO SEVERAL PROMINENT DIVIDED FAMILY CASES AND TO TRIALS OF DISSIDENTS; THE SOVIETS RESENT THE SWEDES' DWELLING ON THIS THEME AND OFTEN LINK THEIR POSITION WITH THAT OF PRESIDENT CARTER. FOR ANOTHER THING, SWEDISH REFUSAL TO YIELD TO SOVIET PRESSURE IN SEVERAL AREAS HAS MADE SOME OF THE RUSSIANS ANGRY; ONE EXAMPLE IS THE SWEDISH REFUSAL TO TURN BACK A SOVIET HIJACKER, A BETTER EXAMPLE IS PUBLIC SWEDISH CRITICAL COMMENTARY ABOUT SUCH MILITARY MATTERS AS SOVIET MISSILE SUBMARINES IN THE BALTIC AND THE DEPLOYMENT OF THE SS-20 MISSILE. WHEN THE RUSSIANS PUT ON THEIR GREAT POWER ACT TOWARDS THE NORDICS, EXPECTING A GENERAL AIR OF COOPERATION IN RETURN, THEY SEEM TO FIND SWEDISH STUBBORNNESS--EVEN IN RELATIVELY MINOR MATTERS--RATHER

ANNOYING. AND THE SHARP TURN OF OPINION AGAINST THE USSR--
ESPECIALLY MARKED SINCE THE END OF THE VIETNAM WAR--APPARENTLY
GETS TO THE RUSSIANS.

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5. IT IS IMPORTANT TO NOTE THAT THESE IRRITANTS IN THE RELATIONSHIP DO NOT MEAN INCREASING TENSION. THE NORDIC AREA IS GENERAL STABLE; THE SWEDES WANT ABOVE ALL TO KEEP IT THAT WAY, AND BELIEVE THEY CAN WITH THE SUPPORT OF THEIR NORDIC FRIENDS IN NATO. THE OCCASIONAL SOVIET BULLY-BOY TACTICS, EVIDENT LAST DECEMBER IN KOSYGIN'S PERFORMANCE WITH THE NORDIC MINISTERS AT HELSINKI, OR SHOWN OCCASIONALLY IN SOVIET RELATIONS WITH NORWAY, DO NOT REPRESENT TO THE SWEDES A SOVIET INTENT TO PUSH FOR CHANGE IN THE NORDIC AREA. NOR DO THEY SEE THE INCREASED STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE OF THE KOLA PENINSULA AS NECESSARILY THREATENING SWEDISH OR NORDIC SECURITY, ALTHOUGH THERE ARE SERIOUS IMPLICATIONS FOR SWEDISH DEFENSE PLANNING WHICH THE SWEDES ARE TAKING INTO ACCOUNT. THE SWEDES DO NOT SEE THE RUSSIANS AS "ON THE OFFENSIVE" IN THE NORDIC AREA. THEY DO SEE THE USSR AS AN INCREASINGLY SELF-CONFIDENT GREAT POWER WHICH, AS ITS POWER GROWS, TAKES A MORE HEGEMONIAL ATTITUDE

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TOWARDS ADJACENT AREAS, INCLUDING THE NORDIC AREA, UNLESS IT ENCOUNTERS REGIONAL OPPOSITION. IT IS THIS POINT THAT IS CRUCIAL, AND THE SWEDES BELIEVE (AS THEY HAVE FOR SOME TIME) THAT AN INDEPENDENT ATTITUDE, BACKED BY CREDIBLE MILITARY STRENGTH, CAN PRESERVE THE SO-CALLED "NORDIC BALANCE" AND KEEP THE REGION FREE FROM SOVIET HEGEMONY OR GREAT POWER CONFLICT.

6. ONE OF THE STRANGE THINGS ABOUT SWEDISH-SOVIET RELATIONS IS THAT FOR MOST SWEDES THE USSR IS A NON-PLACE. THEY HAVE ZERO INTEREST IN THE SOVIET UNION. HARDLY ANYONE STUDIES RUSSIAN, FEW BOTHER EVER TO SEE A SOVIET FILM, AND TRAVEL THERE IS CONSIDERED EXOTIC AND ADVENTEROUS. SOVIET CULTURAL INFLUENCE ON SWEDEN IS NON-EXISTENT, AND EVEN THE COMMUNISTS DERIDE RUSSIAN COMMUNISM. SOME SAY THE SWEDES CONSCIOUSLY PUT THE RUSSIANS OUT OF THEIR MIND BECAUSE OF THE THREAT THE USSR REPRESENTS. IN ANY EVENT, SINCE THE UNITED STATES IS NOW CONSIDERED BY SWEDES AS PART OF THE FAMILY, THE CONTRAST IS STARK--AND PUTS PRESSURE ON SWEDISH STATESMEN TO BE CAREFUL TO SHOW "BALANCE" BETWEEN THE GREAT POWERS IN THEIR POLICIES: THE DE FACTO BELONGING TO THE WESTERN FAMILY IMPELS THE GOVERNMENT TOWARDS A STRONG DE JURE INSISTENCE ON SWEDISH NON-ALIGNMENT. FOR THIS PURPOSE, ROYAL VISITS TO RUSSIA ARE HELPFUL OCCURENCES.

7. ASKED ONCE IN PRIVATE CONVERSATION HOW SHE FELT ABOUT THE RUSSIANS, FOREIGN MINISTER SODER TOLD OF THE STORIES SHE HEARD IN CHILDHOOD ABOUT THE RUSSIAN BOGEYMEN FROM THE EAST--STORIES REFLECTING THE CENTURIES-OLD STRUGGLE BETWEEN SWEDES AND RUSSIANS. THIS IMAGE ENDURES. SWEDES TALK ABOUT POLTAVA AS IF IT WERE NOT LONG AGO, AND THEY DO NOT HIDE WHOM THEIR DEFENSE IS DIRECTED AGAINST. TO THE SWEDE, THE RUSSIAN IS ALIEN, STRONG, AND THREATENING, AS HE HAS BEEN SINCE LONG PAST.

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THE SWEDE DOES NOT EXPECT THIS TO CHANGE FOR THE BETTER, BUT HE EXPECTS TO CONTINUE TO COPE WITH THE RUSSIAN CHALLENGE, AS HE HAS ALSO BEEN DOING FOR A LONG TIME.

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